

“Why do you demand explanations? If they are given, you will once more be facing a terminus. They cannot get you any further than you are at present.”ⁱ —Ludwig Wittgenstein

Notes on Notes

It’s called “diarrheaⁱⁱ of the mouth,” when the words come out nonstop and without control. It’s called “spilling the beans,” when you tell a secret or tattle on someone else. It’s called, “spilling your guts,” when you share the hidden things you keep in your innermost insides. Go ahead, “spit it out”! Extricate that language from your body. Yell until you’re “blue in the face.” There. Feel better now? After all, they say, “Confession is good for the soul.”

When the world first transposed the organ of language from the mouth to hand and eye, some scholars swear that people could not or did not read without speaking out loud. It is in St. Augustine’s *Confessions* where—in a language no longer spoken—the description of a bishop reading with his voice and tongue in absolute quiet, is still causing both oral and written uproar. And now, in the age of electronically mediated communication, while our eyes have trouble following horizontal lines of words yet love to scroll-scroll-scrollⁱⁱⁱ, someone announces the death of handwriting from a rooftop and declares the dominance of keystrokes.

But who are we to understand? In Wittgenstein’s *Zettel*^{iv} the philosopher asks us to, “Imagine human beings who calculate with ‘extremely complicated’ numerals. These present themselves as figures which arise if our numerals are written on top of one another.”^v For example, π to the fifth numeral would be written out as:



These peculiar people, the philosopher posits, perhaps could not explain why they wrote in such a way, “and what the people were doing would seem to us purely intuitive.”^{vi} So let’s follow Wittgenstein’s lead and deem it intuitive. Why not? Did not the sage, Clarice

Lispector, write as an attempt to thrash herself free?^{vii} Does everything really have to be explained? Can't we just trace things back to that language no longer spoken, where *intueri* simply means to look at or over or upon or towards, to consider, to perceive directly, to know by immediate perception.

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ⁱ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, G. E. M. Anscombe, and G. H. von Wright. 1967. *Zettel*. Note 315.

ⁱⁱ Cf. the Old English “scitte” (purging, diarrhea), the Proto-Indo-European “skheid” (cut, separate), and the modern shit/scheiße.

ⁱⁱⁱ How we cling to parchment, even with our modern verbs!

^{iv} *Zettel* can be translated as “little slips of paper” which sometimes seems more accurate than “notes.”

^v Wittgenstein, Ludwig, G. E. M. Anscombe, and G. H. von Wright. 1967. *Zettel*. Note 699.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Lispector, Clarice, Stefan Tobler, and Benjamin Moser. 2012. *Água Viva*. 41.

